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ABSTRACT

Formerly, in the Kansas State College Laboratory High School, Methods was taught concurrently with student teaching. However, the physical setting of the class, level of maturity and experience of the students, and overall instruction were changed as a result of the closing of the campus laboratory school. To accommodate the needs of the students adjustments, which include the following, were made: (1) more time was spent on general orientation, motivation, and visits to local high school speech and drama classes; (2) video tapes of students micro-teaching and role playing were critiqued with the pupils; and (3) the term projects required of the students focused on a resource unit or mini course which included teacher-made tests and evaluation sheets which were critiqued by the class. (WR)

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Teaching the Methods Course in the Absence of the Lab School

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For a period of years I had been speech supervisor and methods instructor in our campus Laboratory High School. Six years ago I left the Lab School and took an assignment within the Department of Speech and Theatre on the same campus. Two years ago the Lab Schools in our state were closed and the responsibility for teaching the Methods Course was given to each academic department. I again found myself teaching Methods, but in a very different setting.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss briefly some adjustments which I have had to make in my most recent role as Methods instructor.

Formerly, in the Lab School, methods was taught concurrently with student teaching, as part of the professional semester. Methods was therefore an integral part of the student teaching experience, and the class met in my regular classroom at a designated hour when I had no scheduled high school class. I was accustomed to methods students who were observing and assisting in my classes throughout the day. Much of our class discussions were spin-offs from my on-going program of instruction and activities in the high school classes, all of which my methods students were participants. Discussions on discipline might be related to an incident in the previous class session; problems in critiquing and evaluation could be related to specific student presentations that day or the day before; my instructional materials files for all courses were always within arm's reach.

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(Paper presented at sectional meeting of the Instructional Development Division of the 1972 Speech Communication Association Convention in Chicago, Illinois).

When I met my first session of the methods class last year, the setting was abruptly different. I felt displaced standing before my small group of students in a bare college classroom. My initial feeling was one of helplessness, and I felt like a rider without a horse. Must this course, which I thought had formerly been so relevant, now be simply another textbook theory course?

I have not fully compensated--nor am I convinced that one can; but I have made some necessary adjustments, both because of the changed physical setting of the class and because of developments in the discipline since I had last taught the course.

First of all, there is now a difference in the level of maturity and experience of my personnel. Formerly, I dealt with college seniors many who were in the last semester of their senior year. They were concurrently taking all their professional education courses along with student teaching. Now our students normally take methods in the junior year prior to their senior-year professional semester. The Methods course is their first exposure to professional education courses beyond one semester of two-hour weekly observations in the public schools during the sophomore year; some may have had educational psychology also. Therefore, I now find it necessary to spend much more time on general orientation, motivation, and establishing a frame of mind and points of reference for our methods work. We now try to visit local high school speech and drama classes more frequently in the early part of the course.

The small size of my methods class enhances effectiveness in our present setting. We can proceed informally in group discussion around a large seminar table. This facilitates maximum feedback and interaction.

I find that I necessarily spend more time on theoretical concepts than I did before, and I require somewhat more outside reading and paper work because we have to rely more heavily on study "about" the concepts than upon discussions of direct observation and participation.

For specific examples, I find myself relying heavily upon my own past high school teaching experiences. I try constantly to remind myself that this technique must be used with discretion lest the "old man's" tall tales of grandeur and woe wear thin to the ears of the listeners.

Probably the best substitute for a live classroom that we have used so far is our newly acquired Sony portable video tape recorder. Students plan micro teaching lessons and teach the members of the class who attempt to role play high school students. Artificial though it is, this strategy creates the semblance of a classroom situation. We video tape these micro teaching and role playing situations, then view and evaluate the playbacks. The students respond very well to this technique and particularly appreciate seeing themselves in action as others see them. I often find that I critique their role playing of the high school student as much as their teaching. I think very possibly, they gain some insights into adolescent behavior through role playing that they might not gain from direct observation, because inexperienced and unsupervised observers often see only the exceptional behaviors and come away with distorted impressions.

Since more than half a decade had passed since I last taught the course, I found other adjustments necessary--not so much from changes in the physical setting of my class--but from changes in the discipline itself. I now spend an extended period of time discussing accountability and teaching students to write "behavorial" objectives--a term that was not in my vocabulary earlier. A second difference is the mini-course concept. Now when we plan course outlines and resource units, we also plan them in terms of potential mini courses.

Other developments have affected content of the methods course. The terms "communication" and "communication theory" have taken on new facets and added significance in the last decade. Today I talk much more about communication theory, the use of communication models, and interpersonal communication than I did formerly. When students peruse and evaluate high school texts for potential use, they are urged to look for a reflection of these trends. We also touch upon the use of simulation games as a teaching technique.

Throughout the course I urge sharing of creative ideas and materials. I urge students to collect and exchange materials for their "Teaching Aids" files, in addition to my handouts. For a term project each student prepares a resource unit or mini course on ditto and shares a copy with each member of the class. These projects also include sample teacher-made tests and evaluation sheets which are carefully critiqued by the group.

Near the beginning of the course, I have always included a brief unit to acquaint the methods students with the High School Activities Association of our state. The inherent "activities" orientation of secondary school speech and drama makes it imperative that the speech teacher understand the rules and regulations of the Activities Association, as well as his relationship and obligations to the organization. The Association regulates all interscholastic activities, and the manual for speech-drama-debate activities alone is an impressive little volume of "Dos" and "Don'ts." Our Association makes a giant contribution to a strong, uniform, and well-regulated, state-wide program of interscholastic speech activities; but violation of the regulations can result in reprimand, probation, or even suspension from further participation. The beginning teacher who is already acquainted with eligibility rules, travel restrictions, fees, deadlines, authorized events, and tournament schedules has a much better chance of proceeding efficiently with his interscholastic speech activities program and avoiding unnecessary mistakes and frustrations.

In my allotted eight minutes I have cited some of the adjustments which I have found useful in returning to the methods course in the absence of the Lab School classroom. I recognize that my situation is by no means unique because those who teach methods in Lab Schools are a scant minority. Yet I feel that the pressures of financial exigency which have forced the closing of our campus Lab School have also forced the loss of a vital aspect of our teacher training program.